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Do Staffordshire Bull Terriers experience more problem behaviours when acquired from rescue shelters than other sources – using CBARQ™ Canine Behaviour And Research Questionnaire.

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Application The results of this research could be promoted through rescue charities to educate potential owners and improve the re-homing rates of rescue shelter SBTs rather than potential owners getting dogs from breeders.

Introduction A study has shown that dogs acquired from rescue shelters are more likely to display behavioural problems than those which have been acquired from breeders or another home environment (Wells *et al*, 2002). This may also be public perception thus reducing the chance of dogs being acquired preferentially from rescue centres than other sources. Another study has shown that the success of dog adoption from rescue shelters is not linked to behavioural problems but whether help is sought for behavioural problems (Diesel, *et al*, 2008). Our study focuses on one breed, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier (SBT), an over-represented breed in UK rescue centres. We use internet mediated research using the validated Canine Research And Behaviour Questionnaire CBARQ™ (Hsu and Serpell, 2003) to explore behaviour of a population of SBT from rescue centres (including exploring the effect of duration of stay) compared with those SBT acquired from other sources.

Materials and Method The CBARQ questionnaire was developed for owners / behaviourists to report typical responses of the dogs to common stimuli in their natural environment (owner report removes confounding factors in test situations). Answers on a Likert scale (e.g. 0 never – 4 always) are used to produce mean scores for behavioural categories e.g. owner-directed aggression; separation-related behaviour. In addition to the validated CBARQ questions, further information was sought regarding length of time in shelter, source (e.g. shelter; breeder and had at owners home since a puppy “permanent home”, foster home). The survey was distributed via internet forums, promoted via dog charity tweets, and conforms to the BPS ethical guidelines for Internet Mediated Research. All data was tested for normality (Shapiro Wilk) and homogeneity of variance (Levene’s test). Differences in behavioural categories were analysed using Kruskal Wallis for non-parametric data.

Results and discussion There was no difference between dogs from a permanent home, rescue shelter or foster home for the following CBARQ behavioural categories Stranger-Directed Aggression; Owner-Directed Aggression; Dog-Directed Aggression; Dog Rivalry; Chasing; Non Social Fear; Touch Sensitivity; Excitability or Attachment. There were significant differences in median scores for Dog Directed Fear (home: 0.25; shelter: 0.25; foster 1.0; $P<0.01$); Stranger Directed Fear (home: 0 shelter: 0 foster: 0; $P<0.05$); Separation Related Problems (home: 0.15; shelter: 0.38; foster 0.0; $P=0.05$) and Energy levels (home: 2.0 shelter: 2.0; foster: 1.0; $P<0.05$). The medians suggest that Shelter Dogs may have more separation problems than home dogs, however the figures for both are very low (n.b. 0 = no problem; 4 = serious problem) Otherwise differences between home and shelter dogs are negligible. Foster dogs appeared to have higher Dog-Directed Fear (perhaps the cause of them being in foster homes), but lower separation problems and less energy. There were no significant differences in any CBARQ behavioural category for shelter dogs when categorised on length of time they had spent in shelter (less than one month, 1-6months, 6+months). Further details of this analysis will be presented.

Conclusion Staffordshire Bull Terriers from rescue centres perform as well as any Staffordshire Bull Terrier who has lived with their owner since a puppy in all CBARQ behavioural categories except perhaps separation problems, however the score for both groups is exceedingly low. We recommend conducting the study on other popular breeds found in shelters.

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